1:Layard E-5 (1914-1915) 1942
0012 Malekula 0012

Degrees of Hostility; Methods of Fighting; Weapons

If we return now to an examination of conditions prior to the arrival of the white man, we find the principle of self-preservation working in conjunction with the mutual hostility between the various moieties and sub-moieties well illustrated in the different methods of fighting and in the choice of weapons used. The chief weapons [1] used were the club, spear, bow and arrow, pitfalls made of sharp bamboo knives set crossing one another edgewise in pits covered with branches and leaves strewn over with earth, and poisoned human bone-tips (*wuh na ta-mat*) and nautilus shells with poisonous spines scattered at night along the paths. Slings, used in neighbouring islands as weapons, were not used in war by the Small Islanders, who made only miniature ones as toys for small boys.

I have already mentioned some of the causes leading to disputes, such as adultery or elopement, which, though sometimes settled amicably through the peaceable return of bride-price in the form of pigs, lead also on occasion to war if the returnable bride-price is not duly forthcoming. Other causes are insults of various kinds, which in turn bring forth counter-insults and in any case drag in their train recriminations based on disputes that may have smouldered for generations. Wars caused by the theft of pigs, so often referred to by white men, are rare, such thefts when they occur being, moreover, invariably but minor incidents in more fundamental disputes connected with complicated loan transactions or such matters as the non-return of bride-price just mentioned.

Disputes such as these may lead either to greater or to lesser wars, depending largely on the degree of kinship existing between the original disputants, and the same consideration determines the choice of weapons. The three relevant categories of kinship recognised throughout Melanesia hold also for the Small Islands. These are: [2]

(*a*) The members of a man's own clan, in this case the patrilocal village.

(*b*) The members of clans belonging to the same "tribe" or district, in this case the individual Small Island.

(*c*) The members of all groups outside the tribe, who are therefore actual or potential foes, in this case properly divisible into two sections, namely:

(i) the inhabitants of the remaining Small Islands and of the villages of the adjacent Malekulan mainland, with whom marriage relations exist, and all of whom therefore belong to one culture-complex;

[1] For detailed descriptions see Layard, 1, and Speiser, 3, pp. 205 ff. and Plates 50-61.
[2] See Wedgwood, 1, p. 8.